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ABSTRACT

This book guides parents and children in developing strategies to figure out words. The first chapter, Skills for Identifying Words, presents general strategies for making sense of words, and for using the eyes and ears to identify words. The first chapter also offers listening and visual exercises. The second chapter, Using Phonics To Identify Words, discusses learning sound-spelling patterns and presents phonics exercises. The third chapter, Decoding by Looking at Word Structure, addresses helping children understand word structure and presents word structure exercises. Based on the self-directed learner philosophy, this book and the others in the series provide: essential comprehension techniques; basic vocabulary and phonics skills; clear guidelines for efficient study; critical thinking frameworks; and activities that lead to becoming a self-directed learner. Each book in the series also provides quick answers to pressing learning problems; easy practice activities for basic skills; common language explanations; and step-by-step guidance to engage children in active learning. (RS)

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HELPING CHILDREN TO LEARN SERIES

ED 437 609

Using Phonics and Other Word Skills

A practical guide for parents and tutors

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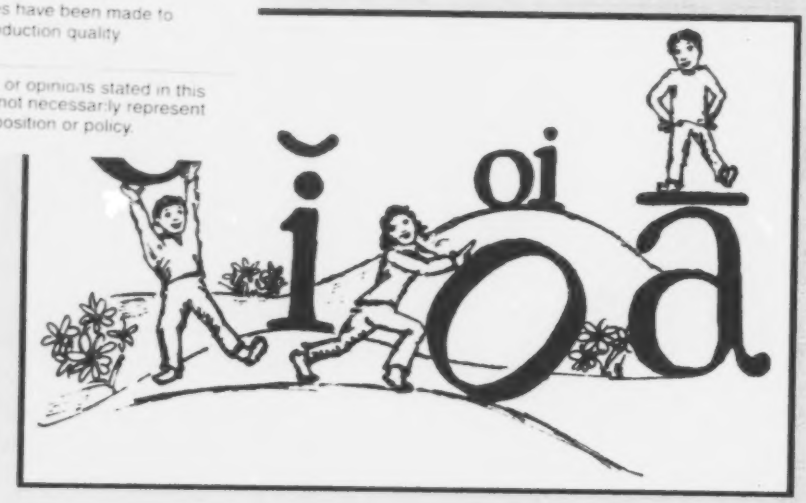

by Carl B. Smith

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for parents and tutors

by Carl B. Smith

Clearinghouse on Reading,
English and Communication

&

The Family Learning Association

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Skills For Identifying Words

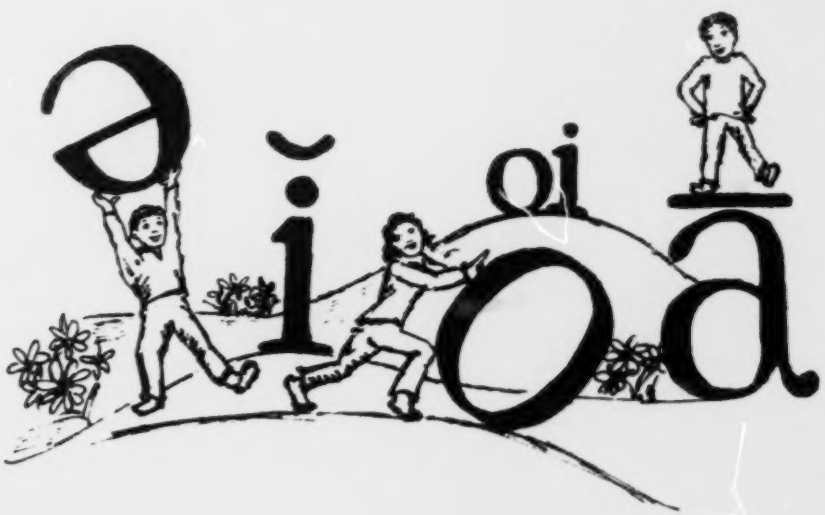
Introduction

Reading and learning to read does not mean simply recognizing words. Obviously we read in order to understand messages. That's our foremost objective. To accomplish the goal of comprehending messages, we work with written words. When we don't recognize a word instantly, we pause in order to figure out what the word is and what it means. That's the purpose of this book—to guide you and your child in developing strategies for figuring out words.

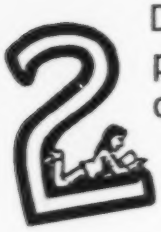
When your child is stumped by a new or difficult word, you can help him work through the problem and learn from it. A few word identification strategies will give your child confidence in figuring out new words in the future. Here are some of the skills and strategies a young learner needs for dealing with such words.

General strategy: making sense

Before looking at specific word skills, we will suggest a simple strategy for dealing with unfamiliar words. Listed below are five steps any learner can follow to figure out unfamiliar words. If your child recognizes the word after step 1 or step 2, that's as far as he needs to go. When reading, the goal is to get the message or the unknown word as quickly and directly as possible. We therefore use the smallest number of cues needed to decipher the print and keep the message flowing. That's the purpose of all word identification strategies—keep the printed message flowing. You can use these steps as you help your child figure out unknown words. Gradually he will learn how to address these problems on his own because this five-step strategy will become automatic. Ask your child the questions listed on the opposite page.



Do the words around the problem word give you a hint of what that new word is or what it means? (Context clues)



Does the beginning sound of the problem word, along with the rest of the sentence, help you figure out what that new word is? (Context plus initial sound)

Do the first two steps, along with looking at the final sound of the word, help you discover what the word is? (Context, initial and final sound)

Does the word have sound-spelling patterns that you recognize? Or does it have recognizable parts, as in *notebook* (note/book) or *rereading* (re/read/ing)? (Context plus patterns)

If you still can't solve the problem, ask someone about the word or use the dictionary to figure out how the word is pronounced and what it means. (Seek help)

At first you will have to remind your child to go through these steps, but over time they will become more automatic. Remember, use only as many steps as are needed to get the word and then keep moving. Here's an example of the process:

The brown fox _____ over the lazy dog.

- **Context**: The fox *did something* over the dog.
- **Initial sound**: *j* as in *June*.
- **Final sound**: *ed* as in *looked.*
- **Sound-spelling pattern**: The base word *jump* fits the C-V-CC pattern (Consonant-Vowel-two Consonants). This gives the letter *u* a short vowel sound as in *much* and *bump*. Add this to what you know about the beginning and ending sounds of the word.
- **Seek help**: Ask someone what the word is, or look up its pronunciation in the dictionary.

As soon as the word *jumped* is figured out, the child continues reading in order to see how this word fits into the whole sentence.

Using the eyes and ears to identify words

Children know a lot about the world of print before they start school. Books, newspapers, signs, television ads, and room decorations give children a sense that printed messages are important and are a normal part of today's world. What you can do as a parent is help your child solve the mysteries of our alphabetic spelling system. In English we represent words and word sounds through patterns of letters and open spaces—that is, when we write we set off words with spaces. In our casual conversation, however, it is not easy to distinguish individual words. Think about two people entering the kitchen and saying these things:

First person: ***"Ja eet?"***
Second person: ***"Na. Joo?"***

Translation:

First person: ***"Did you eat?"***
Second person: ***"No. Did you?"***

You can begin to appreciate one of the problems that young learners encounter when they try to translate that kind of collapsed speech into a print environment, where each word is set off with open spaces and particular sounds are represented by particular letters. Part of learning to read, therefore, is paying attention to word sounds. You probably started that process when your child was in the crib. You held a round object over your child and said, "Ball. See the pretty ball." Or you took your child's hand and placed it on your nose: "Nose. Daddy's nose."

You gave your child a lesson in language and also began helping her learn that different objects are distinguished by different sounds. And as you touched her ears and fingers and toes, she heard some words that sounded quite different (*eyes*, *hands*) and words that sounded alike (*nose*, *toes*). Over time, she learned even the fine distinction between the sounds of *nose* and *toes* and she could point to the right body part (*eyes*, *ears*, *nose*, *toes*) when you asked in full sentences: "Where's Marla's nose?" "Where are Marla's toes?" In this way, your child developed a sophisticated sense of word sounds and language sounds in the first two or three years of life.

By age five or six, when most children begin formal reading instruction in school, your child has become quite adept at listening to a stream of language sounds and knowing what it all means: "Pick up ya toys, puteminabox, 'n hopinatub." Learning to read printed statements is partly a process of keeping the context of the message in mind and partly a process of picking up enough graphic cues to trigger a speech-like flow of language. Most people call those graphic cues *phonics*: the correspondence between

sounds and letters that helps readers associate the printed words with the sounds they hear in speech.

Although there is no magic set of phonics rules that will automatically make reading easy, there are a number of guidelines and practice activities which will help your child realize that there are rules to our spelling system. English spelling makes sense, and she can gradually master those sound-letter patterns to use in figuring out words on the printed page.

If your child reads smoothly and comprehends well, don't insist on doing every phonics exercise in this book. Your child is already doing what's important—reading fluently and understanding the message. If, on the other hand, he stumbles, asks for help, or doesn't understand certain sound-spelling patterns, then use the activities on the following pages to guide his understanding and to give him practice. These activities start with what every English speaker already knows: the sounds of words.

Listening Exercises

Word Differences

Objective

To have your child hear differences in a series of spoken words.

Procedure

Say two words and ask your child if they are the same or different. Start with simple one-syllable words that are obviously different (such as *cat* and *dog*) to make a clear contrast. Then move to pairs of words that are alike (such as *big-pig*, *fat-cat*, *pin-pen*). If your child has no trouble with these pairs, use more than two words at a time, or longer words; for example, look at different forms of the same word (as in *runner-running* or *act-acted*).

Variation

Ask your child to think of other words like *runner-running* and to list as many as he can.

kick	kicker	kicking
sleep	sleeper	sleeping
play	_____	_____
swim	_____	_____
walk	_____	_____
write	_____	_____

Use this as a game or a contest that you can turn to now and then. It helps your child realize that words are interesting and are marked by rather small distinguishing features. These exercises tune in your child's antennae.

Hearing Small Differences in Words

Objective

To have your child figure out exactly what makes two or more words different from each other.

Procedure

Say two words that are different, but have similarities, such as the same first consonant (*cap-can* or *fit-fin*). Make sure your child hears that these pairs of words begin the same way but have different ending sounds. Another way of doing this is to say words that rhyme (*say-pay*). Ask your child how the words are different in their sounds (the beginning *s* and *p* sounds) and how they are alike (they both end with an *-ay* sound). Here are other samples:

rat-cat	rag-ran
man-men	beet-boat

Variation

Say a word and have your child repeat it. Then say two other words and ask which of the words rhyme with the first one. Example: "Which words rhyme with *cat*?" Then slowly say "*cow-hat-car-big-fat*, allowing time for your child to answer after each word. "The next word is *run*. Which of these words rhyme with *run*? *Rain-sun-rub-red-fun*."

Follow-up Exercise

As a game, see how many rhyming pairs your child can make: *fat-cat*, *big-pig*, *hot-pot*, *pain-rain*, and so on. Young children love rhyming activities and will often fill in a rhyming word at the end of a jingle. Mother Goose rhymes provide you with excellent sources, as do simple children's songs.

fat-cat words	big-pig words	hot-pot words
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

pain-rain words	others?
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Using Context and Initial Consonant

Objective

To use the first consonant sound in a word as a clue to what the word is.

Procedure

Say a short sentence in which one word is missing. Example: "The duck was swimming in the l_____." Tell your child that the first sound of the missing word is *l*. What word starting with the *l* sound would tell us where the duck was swimming? (The obvious answer is *lake*.) Use the same sentence, but with a different missing word such as, "The duck was swimming in the w_____" (*water*) or "The duck was swimming in the p_____" (*pond* or *pool*).

Variation

It is important for children to learn that the context of a sentence can often help them figure out unknown words. Show sentences in which you have blocked off or omitted one word. Give the initial consonant and ask your child to complete the sentence as best he can. At first, use sentences with simple words:

The man was walking his d_____.

The b_____ was flying above us.

The first step is to help your child realize that the sentence gives clues to unknown words, and the beginning of the word helps, too.

What's That Word?

Objective

To pick out unclear words while listening to continuous text.

Procedure

Children need to make sense from what they hear as well as what they read. Select a story that fits your child's age and read it aloud. Ask her to stop you when she doesn't understand a word or phrase. It doesn't matter if the problem is with your enunciation or with your child's not knowing the meaning. She should feel free to ask, "What's that word?" any time she needs clarification. The exercise helps your child distinguish meaningful words.

When she stops you, reread the sentence and ask what makes sense in the passage. Then pronounce the word clearly and explain its meaning. Ask your child to repeat the word and then move on. The following text should raise questions:

> Three gerbils escaped from their cage and ran into a meadow. They were so happy to be free that they became very careless. Suddenly a *zoton* swooped down and snatched up the last gerbil in line. The other two scurried down a *curleycue* hoping to find safety. Before they could decide how to rescue the third gerbil, they heard the slithering movement of a *leeringulp* coming towards them. Up the curleycue they zipped and ran to a hollow log to plot the escape of their friend.

(*Zoton* is an imaginary bird that acts like a hawk. *Curleycue* is an imaginary hole in the ground made by the *leeringulp*, an imaginary lizard-like creature who loves to gulp down rodents.)

What's That Word II

Procedure

Read from a book or a newspaper and ask your child to stop you when a word doesn't make sense. Remind him that you want him to make sense of the passage and this is one way that the two of you can pay attention to the sound and meaning of words, even nonsense words.

Grizzlies were protected in 1975 under the Endangered Species Act as a threatened species. Their habitats were protected and it became illegal to shoot them. Officials at Yellowstone National Park required food and trash to be stored in bear-proof containers. In the national forest surrounding Yellowstone, some areas became bear preserves where logging and road building were banned.

Follow-up

You might also challenge your child to read a passage to you and have you also ask: "What's that word?"

Many people living in bear country think that the grizzly should no longer be protected under the Endangered Species Act. Some people are still willing to keep their pets in at night and not hang bird feeders, which attract bears, but others want the game wardens to shoot bears that invade their yards or attack their animals. "The grizzly bear originally was here, so we can't just throw him out," says Charles Price, a rancher who has lost several cows to bear attacks. "We have to learn to live with him, and he has to learn to live with us."

Visual Exercises

Match Letters of the Alphabet

Objective

To find out if your preschool child can recognize and match individual letters of the alphabet.

Procedure

Print letters on a card. You can use all capitals, all lower case, or a mixture, depending on your child's own abilities and needs. Put several of the letters in a row, making sure one or more of the letters are the same as the one you're going to ask the child to match. Say a letter (or show it written on another card) and have the child point to and say that letter when he finds it in the row. Example: Place the letters D G R B E G in front of the child, then say or show the letter G, and have him say it and point to it each time it appears in the row.

Variation

Starting the same way as above, have your child place a matching letter on the one you said or showed to him.

Follow-up

If your child is having trouble with certain letters, you can practice those separately or compare them to other letters until the child becomes familiar with the troublesome letter.

Match Short Words

Objective

To have your child identify words that are repeated in a series.

Procedure

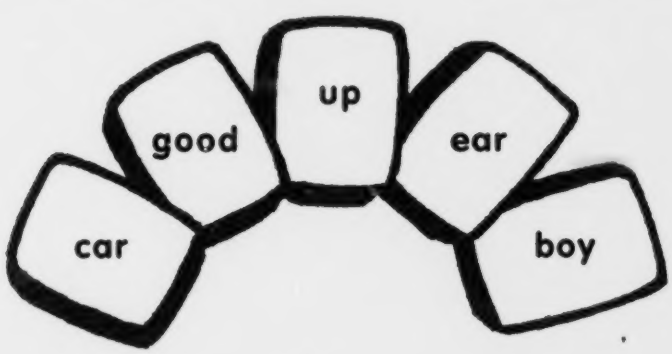
Write several short words on cards (one word per card). Make sure one of the words appears more than once. Ask your child to find the word that is repeated. Example: set cards with the words FOG HOT HAT RAT HOT in front of the child, and have him find the repeated word.

Variation

Place cards, each with a different word on it, in front of your the child. Say or show one of the words and have him match it with one of the words on the cards. Example: put cards with the words CAR GOOD UP EAR BOY in front of the child, show him another card with the word EAR on it (or say it), and have him find the card with the matching word.

Follow-up

As with letters in the previous exercise, you can help your child practice entire words that prove difficult.



Match Rhyming Words

Objective

To have your child match rhyming words.

Procedure

Write several words on cards and lay them out so your child can read them. Two or more of the words should rhyme, but don't repeat any words. Ask your child to find the words that rhyme. Example: Given the words CAR HOT BOY FAR GOOD, your child should point to and say the rhyming words CAR and FAR.

Variation

Place cards, each with a different word on it, before the child. Say a word or show a card with a word on it, and have the child find a word that rhymes. Example: Lay out cards with the words BOOT TOE NOSE RUN EAR, and say or show the word FUN. Have your child find the rhyming word RUN. You could also point to a word and ask the child to say it and give you a word that rhymes with it. It's best to start with words in which the ending sound is spelled the same way.

Follow-up

Sing a song or recite a jingle with rhyming words. Ask your child to pick out the words that rhyme. Then write them on a card or a piece of paper for your child to see.

Jack Sprat would eat no fat
His wife would eat no lean.
And so between them both, you see,
They licked the platter clean.

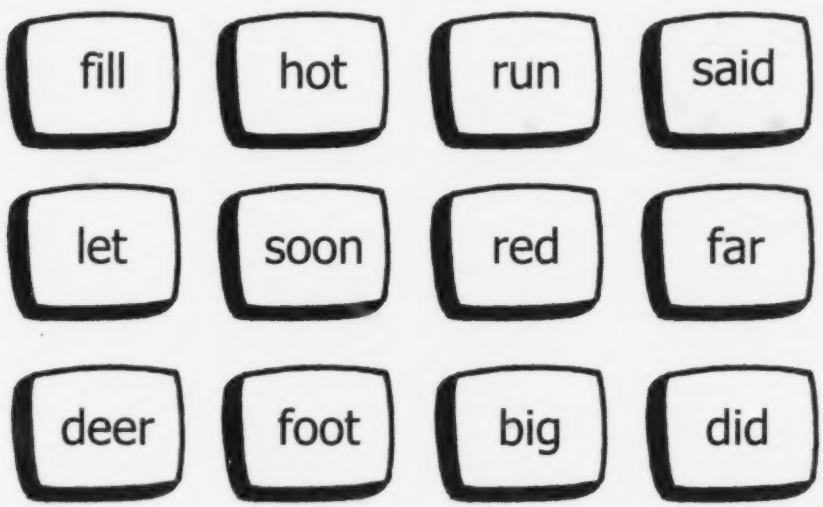
Identifying Consonant Sounds

Objective

To have your child match words with the same beginning or ending consonant.

Procedure

Write 6 to 12 words on individual cards. Have your child find a pair with the same first or last consonant. After she has matched the words, ask her to pronounce the words to hear the similarity in the way they begin or end. Here are some sample words:



Some words will fit in both categories: *run* begins with the same letter as *red*, and *red* also ends with the same letter as *did* and *said*. Have your child find words that begin with the same consonant (*fill-far-foot*; *soon-said*; *deer-did*; *rat-red-run*) and words that end with the same consonant (*run-soon*; *far-deer*; *big-leg*; *hot-foot*; *red-did-said*).

Variation — double consonants

Use words that begin with more complex sounds: *bl-* in *blue, blast*; *dr-* in *dress*, *drive*; *ch-* in *chop*, *change*; and so on. You might also give your child a list of words that are all different and have her come up with words that begin or end with the same sounds as those on the list.

Word	Begin the same	End the same
blue		
blast		
dress		
drive		
chop		
skit		
string		

Using Phonics to Identify Words

Our alphabet is a set of visual symbols that stand for speech sounds. Early in the process of learning to read, a child must learn how to handle this code—how to translate the symbols into sounds and vice versa. As your child matures and becomes more skilled in dealing with written language, the translating becomes more and more automatic. However, before this can happen, a child must master the connection between language that is *heard* and language that is *seen*.

Although the link between spoken and written English is not always one-to-one, a child must learn the common sound-symbol relationships of the alphabet as a step toward learning to read. In our written language, there are many rules that can be helpful to a young reader.

Distinguish Vowels and Consonants

The most important point to make about the alphabet is that it is divided into *vowels* and *consonants*. The vowels are *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, and sometimes *y* (in *try* and *why*) and *w* (in *low* and *slow*). Vowels carry the open, unblocked sounds of the words and can be pronounced easily when separated from words.

Vowel sounds can be long or short. They are long when pronounced as they appear in the alphabet. The same letters can also represent short vowel sounds.

Long	**Short**
a in *age*	*a* in *at*
e in *eel*	*e* in *egg*
i in *ice*	*i* in *it*
o in *over*	*o* in *odd*
u in *use*	*u* in *up*

Consonants interrupt and modify vowel sounds, turning those sounds into recognizable syllables and words. For example, adding the letter *d* at the beginning of the *ay* vowel sound gives us the word *day*, and putting a *t* after the vowel sound *ea* creates the word *eat*.

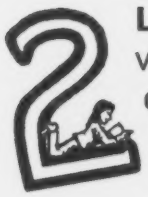
Sometimes certain combinations of letters make the vowel sound different from either the short or long sounds. For example, the *a* in *car* is modified by the *r* that follows it, and when *o* and *i* are combined in *oil*, they create a sound that is not exactly like either of the vowels by itself.

Learn Sound-Spelling Patterns

The idea behind what is called *phonics* is to teach students that they can group vowels and consonants into reliable patterns. Encourage your child to use these patterns. He can search the daily newspaper for words that fit the patterns he has just learned. Of course, a beginner may be able to pick out the patterns only in one-syllable words.

The five most important phonics rules are given on the following page. They should help guide your child through early reading efforts.

Short vowel rule. If there is only one vowel in a word or syllable, the vowel usually has a short sound if it appears at the beginning or in the middle of the word. Some examples are *at*, *fed*, *bit*, *hot*, and *up*.



Long vowel rule 1. If a word has one vowel in the middle and a silent *e* at the end, the main vowel in the word usually has a long sound: *make*, *time*, *hope*, *tune*.

Long vowel rule 2. If two vowels are joined in a word or syllable, the first vowel usually has a long sound and the second vowel is silent. Sometimes the same vowel letter is repeated (*seem*, *roof*), but more often two different vowel letters are joined (*rain*, *meat*, *road*).

"Murmur" rule. If a vowel is followed by an *r*, the sound of the vowel is altered. It takes on a different sound that is "controlled" by the letter *r*: *car*, *perk*, *sir*, *word*, *turn*, and *port*, for example.

Diphthong rule. In some words that have two vowels joined together, the vowels are blended to form a new sound that is not exactly like either vowel by itself: *oi* in *coin*, *oy* in *boy*, *ow* in *now*, and *ou* in *out*, for example. This new "gliding" sound is called a *diphthong*.

Phonics Exercises

Phonics guidelines teach children to decode written words into the sounds they represent. Here are some exercises you can use to help your child.

✧ **Connect the sound and the letter.** Make the sound of the letter that you are teaching your child, and have her imitate what you do. Show how the mouth is shaped and how the lips and tongue move when you form the letter. For example, you might contrast the part the tongue plays in making the *d* sound in *dog* with the role of the lips in forming the *p* sound in *pet*: I have a pet dog.

✧ **Show the link between the sound of a word and its written form.** It is best to use short words when explaining sound-letter connections. Since these phonics sounds appear only in whole words, always demonstrate sound-letter connections in real words. For example, the sound of the letters *b, u,* and *g* will make more sense to the child if combined into the word *bug*.

✧ **Change letters to show changes in sounds.** Use a series of words like the following to show how small changes in sound make a new word.

bit - bat bat - cat cat - cab

cab - car car - far

As you see, after each change, the last word in the pair becomes the first word in the next pair. The child learns that different letters represent different sounds, and different sounds change meanings.

Find words that rhyme.

As children try to find rhyming words, they become aware of words that have the same middle and ending sounds. Give your child a word and ask for words that rhyme with it. You can approach this as a variation of the previous drill and ask the child to make rhymes by substituting the first letter in a word with other letters:

ran — can — man
fin — pin — win
cop — hop — shop

Emphasize word beginnings and endings.

Sometimes your child will be able to figure out a word by looking at the first and last letters and thinking about what sounds they represent. Context clues can help, too. For example, if the child sees the word *sofa*, he might not recognize it, but he can sound out the *s* and *o* and figure it out from the rest of the sentence: The boy sat down on the big *sofa*.

The general theme of phonics (decoding) is that English spelling is consistent enough to help readers with most words. By learning rules about sound-symbol relationships and word order, a child gradually learns to make predictions about new words. By the time they get into the first grade, most children have a good number of these rules about word order and context in their minds.

Through phonics, we build on this basic knowledge and help them recognize English spelling patterns. This reassures children and gives them confidence that they will gradually master the sound-spelling system. Remember that the goal here is to enable your child to use phonics in reading, not recite rules from memory.

Consonant and Vowel Identification by Name

Objective

To have your child identify letters by name and tell whether the letters are consonants or vowels.

Procedure

Write a series of letters in both capitals and lower case and in no particular order. You could also use letters written on cards for earlier exercises; just place several of them in a row. Ask your child to name each letter and to say whether it's a vowel or a consonant.

B G r H t u E j

o f T S v a l n

Q z p X y W i M

Variation

Show your child the series of letters. Have her point to the letter you say and tell you if it's a consonant or a vowel. Keep picking letters at random from the series.

Consonant and Vowel Identification by Sound

Objective

To have your child identify the first sound in words, tell whether it's a vowel or consonant, and think of another word beginning with the same sound.

Procedure

Write a series of words, or use those made for earlier exercises. Each word should begin with a single consonant (*cat*, *dog*, *top*, etc.). Say each word and have your child tell you:

1) what letter stands for the first sound in the word;
2) whether that letter is a vowel or a consonant;
3) another word that starts with the same sound.

Variation

Show your child a group of words. Say one of them and have him find it and tell you whether the first sound is a vowel or a consonant. Ask for another word that starts with the same sound.

bear _____
horse _____
eagle _____
animal _____
cactus _____
ice _____
log _____

Recognizing the Beginning Consonant

Objective

To have your child identify the first consonant in a nonsense word and give another word that starts with the same consonant. This is similar to the previous exercise, but nonsense words are used so that the attention is on the sounds and letters heard at the beginning of the words.

Procedure

Say a group of nonsense words, each starting with a clear, single consonant. After each one, have your child tell you the beginning letter and another word that starts with the same consonant. Some nonsense words that might be used are:

BARG	COBE	DOP	FURB	GUG
HAB	JID	KAG	LORP	MEP
NOP	POLD	ROG	SARD	TEB

You may want to start with one example to show your child how it words: "If I say BARG, you could tell me it starts with the letter ___. That's right: B. Now tell me another word that starts with the same sound as BARG." (BOY, BIRD, etc.)

Variation

Show the child each nonsense word, have her pronounce it or at least identify the first consonant, and give another word starting the same way.

First Consonant Clapping Game

Objective

To practice listening for the first consonant in words.

Procedure

Make a separate card for each consonant to be practiced. On each card, list several words that start with a particular consonant. Among the words should be some that your child can't spell, so all of his attention is on the first consonant. Using a dictionary, you can come up with a list of words of varying difficulty. For example, the *b* card might include *back*, *badger*, *boot*, and *bacteria*. On the *m* card you could write *mouse*, *match*, *mackerel*, *mumble*, and so on.

To help your child practice the first consonant *b*, you would say some of the words from that card mixed with words from other cards. Each time your child hears a word beginning with the letter *b* he should clap; if the word doesn't start with *b*, he shouldn't clap.

Variation

You can take the same approach in practicing consonants at the end of words. For example: "Clap when you hear the *t* sound at the end of any word."

Final Consonant Riddle Game

Objective

To practice listening for final consonants and making the connection between the sounds and letters for those consonants.

Procedure

Print riddles on cards and give a clue about the answer word and its final consonant. Here are some examples:

I am thinking of a word that ends like ***red***. It is a place to sleep. What is it? *(bed)*

I am thinking of a word that ends like ***man***. It is a time when we eat lunch. What is it? *(noon)*

I am thinking of a word that ends like ***miss***. Dad uses a mower on it. What is it? *(grass)*

You can read each riddle to your child and tell her to give you the answer word and its final consonant. You may also want her to write the answer or pick it from a group of words you've written on cards.

Variation

Follow similar steps in working with your child on first consonants.

Consonant Digraph "Grab Game"

Objective

To practice the sound-symbol link in consonant digraphs (two-letter combinations that have a different sound than the two letters alone would have: ***ch****op*, ***sh****ow,* ***th****, **ring***, etc.).

Procedure

Print consonant digraphs on small cards. Some digraphs come up most often at the beginning of words (***wh****at*, ***qu****ick*), others are usually found at the end of words (***ne****ck*, ***sing***), and some may appear at either end (***ch****op*, ***ri****ch*; ***sh****ip*, ***wi****sh*). Here are some of the digraphs you can write on cards:

Make a list of words beginning with consonant digraphs (*choose*, *when*, *shut*, *quick*, *that*, etc.) Place the digraph cards in front of your child and then say a word from your list. The child should point to the correct card and tell you what the digraph is. Follow the same procedure for words that end with digraphs. If you think your child can handle it, you could work with digraphs in the middle of words, too, as in ***requ****est*, ***ach****ieve*, *wea****th****er*, ***awh****ile*, etc.

Consonant Blends

Objective

To have your child identify the sound of consonant blends and to think of words that contain blends. Consonant blends are pairs of consonants that are joined smoothly when pronounced so that there is no break between them. The most commonly used blends involve a consonant followed by *l* (***bl**ue*, ***cl**ap*, ***fl**ip*, ***gl**ue*, etc.) or a consonant followed by *r* (***br**ick*, ***cr**eek*, ***dr**op*, ***fr**ee*, etc.).

Procedure

Write several consonant blends on cards and show them to your child one at a time. Tell him to say the sound the letter pair makes, and ask for a word that has the blend in it. It's easiest to come up with words with the blends at the beginning.

BLEND	POSSIBLE WORDS
tr	train, tree, truck
dr	draw, dream, drag
bl	blue, blow, blend
gl	glow, glue, glad
br	brown, breeze, brag
sl	sleep, slow, slip
fr	fry, free, from
gr	green, grass, grow
cl	close, clean, clip
cr	crow, cream, creek
fl	flow, fly, fling
st	stop, story, sting
pl	play, plow, please

Consonant Blends

Objective

To have your child think of words that begin with certain consonant blends.

Procedure

Say pairs of letters that form consonant blends (as shown in the preceding exercise). Ask your child to write those consonants and say the sound they make when combined. Then the child should say or write a word with the blend in it. For example, if you gave your child the letters *gr*, she would write those letters and say or write a word such as *green*, *grow*, or *grass*.

Here are the blends that are most often found at the beginning of words:

B — L	B — R
C — L	C — R
F — L	D — R
G — L	F — R
P — L	G — R
S — L	P — R
	T — R

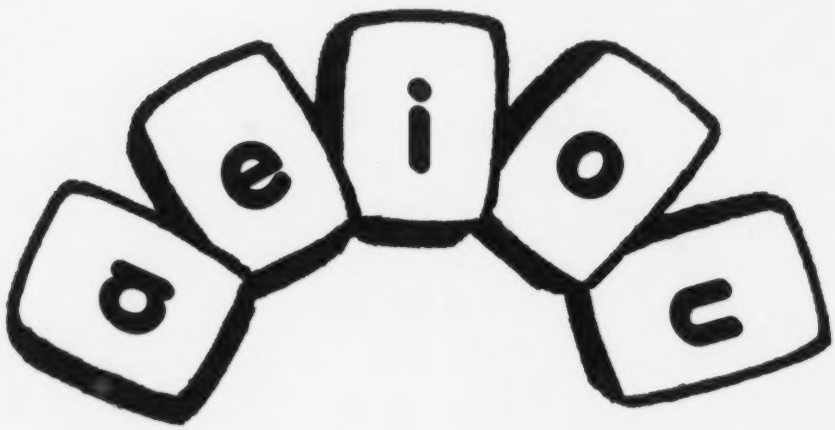
Long Vowels

Objective

To practice recognizing the letter symbol for each long vowel and to think of words that have the same vowel sound. Long vowels are easy to recognize because they have the sound of the letters *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u* as they appear in the alphabet.

Procedure

Write short words on cards. Each word should contain a long vowel sound. A few words begin with long vowel sounds (*ape*, *ice*, *owe*, *use*). Many more long vowel words begin with a consonant sound followed by the long vowel, a consonant, and the final letter *e* (*tape*, *page*, *nice*, *ride*, *nose*, *hope*, *cube*, *tune*). The final silent *e* acts as a marker that lets you know the main vowel is long. Although there are many other spelling patterns for long vowels, we will stick to this VC*e* pattern (Vowel-Consonant-final *e*) for now.



As you show each card to your child, he should read the word and identify the vowel ("*Name* has the long *a* sound"). As an alternative, say the word and have him name the vowel and another word with the same vowel sound. In many cases it will be possible to think of rhyming words. For example, after you say the word *gate* your child would say, "*Gate* has a long *a* sound. Another word is *late*." For a greater challenge, ask your child for a word that has the same vowel sound but does *not* rhyme (*gate-make*, for example).

For older children, you can make this even more challenging by giving a word with the vowel at the beginning and asking for a word with that sound in the middle (*ice - nice*; *age - page*; etc.). You can also reverse the process.

Short Vowels

Objective

To practice recognizing the letter that stands for each short vowel and thinking of other words that contain the same sound. A few words begin with short vowels (*at*, *egg*, *it*, *odd*, *up*), but many more words begin with consonants followed by the short vowel and a final consonant (*hat*, *red*, *big*, *top*, *bug*). Furthermore, many short-vowel words begin or end with consonant digraphs and blends (*that*, *chat*, *black*; *shell*, *west*, *check*; *ship*, *which*, *brick*; etc.).

Procedure

Follow the directions given in the preceding exercise, but use words with short vowel sounds at the beginning or in the middle (*at*, *flat*; *up*, *cup*; etc.) Try to avoid having the child just give you a rhyming word each time (*fat-cat*; *hot-pot*; etc.). If need be, you can ask for something other than a word that rhymes, or you can use words with more than one syllable (*attack*, *expect*, *insist*, *bottle*, *tumble*), which are more difficult to rhyme. Notice that the short vowel should appear in the *stressed* syllable of two-syllable words in order to be clearly heard.

Long and Short Vowels

Objective

To practice recognizing the difference between long and short vowel sounds in pairs of words.

Procedure

Write pairs of words on cards, making sure that the words in each pair use the same vowel. One word should have a short vowel and the other, a long vowel (*cap-cape*, for example). Show or say the words to your child and ask which one has the long vowel sound. We have already stressed long-vowel words that end with silent *e* (*fat-fate* or *hop-hope*), so add some long-vowel words that follow other patterns (*rain*, *say*, *tree*, *meat*, *try*, *night*, *old*, *road*, etc.). Here are some examples of pairs of words you might use:

h**u**t - c**u**te	p**a**t - t**a**pe	p**o**p - b**oa**t
r**o**pe - t**o**p	**e**ven - resp**e**ct	h**i**t - n**i**ght
m**e**t - m**ea**t	**u**p - conf**u**se	m**ai**d - m**a**d

Mix up the order so the word with the long vowel sound doesn't always appear in the same position. Some of the words you use might contain several vowels, so you may want to underline the vowel that you plan to emphasize.

Vowels Controlled by the Letter *r*

Objective

To practice using vowels which are changed from their usual long or short sounds by a following letter *r* (these are known as *r*-controlled vowels).

Procedure

Use the following list to practice identifying the vowel + *r* combination in each word. Have the child read from the list and give you the *r*-controlled vowel. After a number of examples, ask your child to explain what happens when a vowel is followed by an *r*. (It is changed so that it is neither long nor short.) Ask them to write at least two more words for each category

ar	***are***	***er***	***or***
farm	care	her	for
star	scare	prefer	horn
car	beware	term	corn
barn	bare	herd	horse
hard	flare	perch	form
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

or	***ir***	***ur***
word	bird	burn
work	girl	fur
worm	dirt	turn
worry	fir	curl
worst	stir	hurl
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Diphthongs

Objective

To practice recognizing and using *diphthongs* (gliding speech sounds formed by connecting two vowels, such as the *oi* in *coin* and the *ou* in *house*).

Procedure

Using the following list, have your child identify the two vowels involved in each diphthong. Mix words from different lists so you don't emphasize one diphthong more than others. You can also use these words in some of the earlier exercises. Ask your child to give you two more for each spelling group.

oi	***oy***	***ou***	***ow***
coin	boy	trousers	flower
soil	toy	outside	shower
boil	joy	mountain	howl
oil	oyster	ground	down
join	enjoy	loud	how
point	loyal	around	crown
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Other sample words

noise enjoy mouse brown
spoil destroy couch growl
choice voyage ground coward
moisture decoy blouse prowl

Decoding by looking at word structure

Dividing words into parts to find meaning

The meaning or pronunciation of a word may change if prefixes or suffixes are added (as with the prefix *un-* in *unlock* or the suffix *-ic* in *heroic*), if compound words are created (such as *warehouse*), if the word ends with an inflection (as with the *-ed* in *waited*), and so on. Often it helps us understand words better if we divide them into their components to see how they are put together. Adults know how to do this from experience and from what they learned in early reading instruction. Children gain more control if they understand *word structure*: the way in which many words are constructed by combining individual parts.

Over time, your child must learn to break words down into meaningful sections and to recognize and understand these sections. It's not always easy, but there are many hints that can help children understand word structure. Some of them are on the following page.

- **Base word.** This is the most fundamental form of a word. For example, *run*, *walk*, *house*, *car*, *fast*, and *slow* are all base words. They convey each word's meaning without any modification by prefixes, suffixes, or inflectional endings. The base word often remains unchanged even when other word parts such as prefixes or suffixes are added. For example, the base word *act* remains clear in related forms such as *acted*, *acting*, *action*, *react*, *actor*, *activate*, or *reaction*.

- **Inflectional endings: -s, -ed, -ing.** These are the letters added to show how a word is used. For example, verbs use the basic form with most subjects (*I look*, *you look*) but add the inflection *-s* when the subject is *he*, *she*, *it*, or a proper name (*she looks*, *Mary looks*). The inflection *-ed* is added to many verbs to show that something happened in the past (*looked*, *waited*), and the inflection *-ing* is used to show that action is continuing (*looking*, *waiting*). Many nouns add the inflection *-s* to form the plural (*book*, *books*), but those nouns that end with some variation of the /s/ sound add *-es* in the plural (*buses*, *bushes*, *boxes*, etc.). We will look at other inflections as we go along.

- **Compound word.** A compound word is made up of two or more individual words joined to form a new word. Sometimes the compound retains the meanings of the original words, as in *notebook* (the *book* in which we take *notes*), but in other cases a completely new meaning results (as in *broadcast* or *outline*).

- **Prefix.** A prefix is not a complete word in itself; it is a word part added to the *beginning* of a base word. Each prefix does have a meaning, and it has the effect of changing the meaning of the base word. For example, the prefix *un-* means "not," and when attached to the word *worthy* results in the opposite meaning, ***un****worthy*. The prefix *re-* often means "again," and when added before the word *wrap* it gives the word ***re****wrap*, meaning to repeat the action. The prefix *dis-* means "not" or the opposite of something, and added to the word *like* means the opposite, ***dis****like*.

- **Suffix.** A suffix is a word part added to the *end* of a base word. A suffix does not change the fundamental meaning of the base word, but it does have the effect of changing the way the word may be used in the sentence. For example, the suffix *-ful* added to the end of the noun *pain* gives the adjective *pain****ful***, and the suffix *-ize* added to the noun *memory* gives the verb *memor****ize***.

- **Contraction.** A contraction is a shortened form of two words joined into one. In the process, some letters are dropped and the missing letters are replaced with an apostrophe ('). Many contractions are formed by joining a pronoun to a shortened form of a verb: the words *he is* can be contracted to *he's*, *you are* becomes the contraction *you're*, and *she will* becomes *she'll*. Another group of contractions involves a verb followed by a shortened form of the word *not*, with an apostrophe taking the place of the *o* in *not*. For example, *can not* becomes *can't*, *do not* becomes *don't*, and *is not* becomes *isn't*.

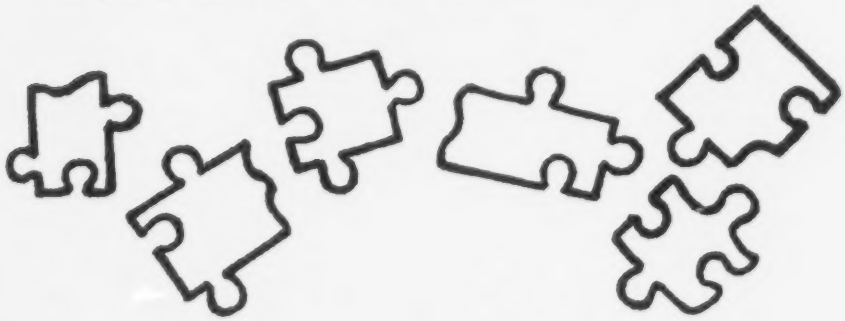
Helping your child understand word structure

You can start to help your child understand the structure of words as soon as she begins to read. At first, it's enough to just point out some of these elements, especially in simple cases. You can show, for example, that a word such as *book* is made plural just by adding the letter *s*; i.e. *books*. Compound words are formed by putting two words together: *foot/ball* or *sun/shine*, for example. More complicated types of word structure can wait until later.

There is one logical sequence you can follow as you work with your child. Here is the sequence:

- Base words (*cat*, *tree*, *run*, *the*, etc.)
- Inflectional endings (*-s*, *-es*, *-ed*, *-ing*)
- Compound words (*sailboat*, *baseball*)
- Prefixes (***mis**match*, ***un**tie*)
- Suffixes (*care**ful***, *use**less***)
- Contractions (*we're*, *isn't*)

For the most part, simple examples of inflectional endings, compound words, and contractions are discussed during the first grade. More complex word changes are presented in second and third grade.



✧ Inflectional endings

— Simple plural nouns formed by adding *-s* (*birds*, *books*)

— The present and past tense and the present participle (the *-ing* form) of basic verbs (*look*, *looks*, *looked*, *looking*).

— A limited number of possessive forms (***'s***) that may appear in stories (the *bird's* nest, the *boy's* book, *John's* coat, *Mary's* hat).

✧ Compound words

— Children gradually learn to use compound words made up of pairs of words that are themselves familiar (*sunshine*, *baseball*, *sidewalk*, *moonlight*, *notebook*, *homework*, etc.).

✧ Contractions

— Some of the most frequently used contractions may be taught to first graders: *can't*, *don't*, *isn't*, *I'm*, *he's*, *she's*, *that's*, etc.

Word Structure Exercises

The following exercises are designed to practice skills that children need as they learn about word structure. If you find that your child would benefit from more practice on a particular skill, simply return to the exercises on that point.

Plural Nouns Ending with *-s* or *-es*

Objective

To practice forming plural nouns by adding *-s* and *-es* for the plural.

Procedure

Print nouns on individual cards, each appearing in singular form on one card and in plural form on another. At first, use words whose plural only requires an *-s*: *dog–dogs*; *hat–hats*; *coat–coats*; *car–cars*; *tree–trees*; etc. Later you can work with singular nouns that end with *-s (bus)*, *-ss (glass)*, *-x (box)*, *-sh (bush)*, *-ch (lunch)*, and *-tch (watch)*. Because of their ending, these nouns require *-es* to form the plural (*buses, glasses, boxes, bushes, lunches, watches)*. Show each card to your child and ask if each noun is singular or plural. If the noun is in the plural form, you can also ask for its singular form, and vice versa.

Variation

It is also a good idea to have your child use both forms of the noun in a sentence. When the noun is used as a direct object, this will be fairly simple ("I see the *boy*" and "I see the *boys*"), but when the noun is used as a subject and changes from singular to plural, the verb changes, too ("The *car is* red" or "The *cars are* red"). Ask your child to write sentences using these words in their plural forms: *bush, case, bee, fax.*

Plural Nouns Ending with *-s, -es,* or *-ies*

Objective

To practice making plural nouns using not only *-s* and *-es* but also *-ies* for singular nouns ending in *y* (*city, cities*, for example). Make sure your child understands that the final *y* changes to *i* before *-es* is added.

Procedure

Make a set of cards with a singular noun on each one. Make another set containing only the plural endings *-s*, *-es*, and *-ies*. Be sure to have enough plural cards to match the eight words in each grouping. Here are some words you can use:

-s	*-es*	*-ies*
boy	dress	baby
bird	lunch	puppy
school	fox	city
book	glass	bunny
girl	kiss	pony
hat	box	lady
pet	dish	party
door	watch	candy

Your child should pick one of the noun cards and try to figure out which ending card goes with it to make the word plural, as shown below.

The Plurals Game

As a game for two or more children, shuffle all of the cards together. Give five cards to each player and put the rest in the middle of the playing area. The first player draws the top card from the deck and tries to match it with a card in his hand to form a plural word. If he can make a match, he can lay down the two cards in front of him. That player then lays down a card, placing it next to the deck. The next player can either pick up that card or draw the next one from the deck. The player who is first to use up all of his cards wins.

Choosing a Plural Ending

Objective

To practice choosing the correct plural form for various singular nouns.

Procedure

Write a list of singular nouns and follow each one with three possible spellings for its plural form. For beginners, you could limit the list to nouns whose plural adds only *-s*. Later you can add words that add *-es* and *-ies*, making the list as challenging as you want for older children. Here are some suggestions:

Singular	Pick the correct plural form		
ship	shipes	ships	shipers
city	citys	cities	cityes
leaf	leafs	leafes	leaves
cow	cows	cowes	cowers
fox	foxes	foxs	foxxs
doll	dolles	dols	dolls
army	armys	armies	armyes
box	boxs	boxes	boxies

If you are working with an older child, you may want to focus on those nouns whose plural forms are "irregular" and require a change in the spelling of the vowel, not just the addition of an ending: *man-men*; *woman-women*; *mouse-mice*; *foot-feet*; etc.

Verb Endings

Objective

To have your child pick the correct verb form from among three choices given in a sentence.

Procedure

Write complete sentences, but include three possible forms for the verb in each sentence. Have your child read the sentence and pick the correct verb form. If you like, you can link sentences together to form a story. By taking that approach, the learner has to pick the right verb form or the story won't make sense. Here's a sample story:

Yesterday John ***(lose, lost, loses)*** his hat on the playground at school. Today he is (***look, looked, looking***) for it. I hope John (***find, found, finds***) his hat soon. If he doesn't he will (***felt, feel, feeling***) very sorry. His head will also get wet, because it looks as if it will start (***rain, rained, raining***) before long.

Verb Endings

Objective

To practice writing the correct verb forms from a list of base words.

Procedure

Write individual verbs in their base form on cards. Write active verbs that can be used in simple sentences (*run*, *wait*, *look*, *throw*, *hit*, etc.). On a piece of paper, write short sentences in which each verb can be used in its various forms: present tense *(I **run**, she **runs**)*, past tense *(we **ran**, they **ran**)*, and present participle *(I am **running**, he is **running**, they are **running**)*. Have your child pick a verb from the stack of cards and then read each sentence, filling in the correct verb form. You can use sentences such as these:

Today I _____. I am _____.

Yesterday I _____. The boy _____.

If your child picked the verb *work*, the sentences would be:

Today I ***work***. I am ***working***. Yesterday I ***worked***. The boy ***works***.

Possessive Endings

Objective

To practice recognizing endings that show ownership.

Procedure

Usually possession is shown by adding an *apostrophe* and the letter *s* (***'s***) to a singular noun *(one car**'s** radio)* and by adding only an apostrophe to a plural noun that already ends with *s (two cars**'** radios)*. Use sentences such as the following that involve the idea of ownership. Have your child tell you which is the right word to use.

This book belongs to the boy. It is the (*boys, boy's, boy*) book.

These bicycles belong to the three girls over there. They are the (*girls, girls', girl's*) bicycles.

The river is very high after the rain. The (*rivers, rivers', river's*) current is strong.

If your child has started learning possessive pronouns in school, you can practice them as well.

This is my book. This book is (*me, mine, myne*).

That book has a green cover. (*Its, It's, It*) cover is green. (Be sure your child doesn't confuse the words *its* and *it's*. The possessive pronoun is spelled *its*; the word *it's* is a contraction which means *it is*.)

You can also give your child a sentence (such as ***"The car has a broken window"***) and ask her to reword it using the possessive form (***"The car's window is broken"***).

Compound Words

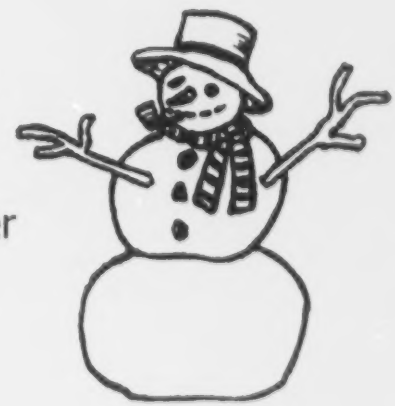
Objective

To practice recognizing the individual words included in compound words.

Procedure

Write compound words on cards or on a sheet of paper. Ask your child what individual words make up the compound and why the two words are put together. For example, a *snowman* is the figure of a *man* made of *snow;* a *fingerprint* is the *print* made by a *finger.* You may use the word list below or choose other compound words your child understands.

baseball	bedtime	daylight
sandbox	coffeepot	mailbox
kneecap	flagpole	flashlight
classroom	fingertip	footprint
basketball	tablecloth	mousetrap
raincoat	staircase	snowman
airplane	sawdust	
sailboat	bedroom	
sunshine	showroom	
football	rooftop	
bookcase	cowbell	
beehive	horsepower	



Compound Words

Objective

To practice forming compound words.

Procedure

Write one part of a compound word on one card and the other part of that compound on another card. Number the paired cards on the back, as shown below.

row	boat
1	1

Some cards may have two or more numbers on the back because they match more than one card. (For example, *boat* can also be combined with *sail*, *tug*, *motor*, or *speed*.)

Deal out several cards to all players. Several children can play or you can play with your child. Each player starts a turn by drawing a card from the hand of the player to his right. The player then lays down any pairs that make compound words. Each match can be checked by seeing if the numbers on the back match as well. The children should keep playing until all of the cards are used up. Whoever forms the most compound words wins.

Compound Words and Imagination

Objective

To practice using compound words in context.

Procedure

Write five or six compound words on a piece of paper, or write individual compound words on cards. Use words that are not related to each other. Your child should pick several of the words and make up a story using all they have chosen. This will call for imagination and a sense of humor. They may choose a group made up of *boxcar*, *goldfish, grandmother*, *basketball*, *beehive*, for example; then they will have to play with the words to make up a brief story.

This activity is valuable in a number of ways: it gives your child a chance to use compound words in context; it calls for imagination in the expression of ideas; it requires your child to use phonics skills in spelling; it includes writing practice; and it requires your child to read his own ideas and understand what he reads.

Prefixes

Objective

To practice identifying prefixes in words.

Procedure

On a sheet of paper, write words that have prefixes. You can use the following examples or come up with your own. Read from the list and ask your child to identify the prefix in each word. Give words with different prefixes so the exercise isn't too predictable. As an added challenge, include words that don't have prefixes so your child won't assume there always will be one. Have your child say or underline the prefix in each word.

un-	***re-***	***pre-***
untie	rewrite	precooked
undress	reread	preview
unsafe	return	prepaid
unable	refill	pretend
unpack	recount	preschool

in-	***im-***	***en-***	***ex-***
inactive	impatient	enclose	export
inside	imperfect	enforce	express
inland	impolite	enlarge	exclude
insane	immortal	enjoy	exhale

mid-	***dis-***	***mis-***
midnight	displease	misbehave
midday	disconnect	misfortune
midwinter	disagree	misuse
midstream	disobey	mislead
midway	dishonest	mistreat

Prefixes

Objective

To practice building new words by adding prefixes to base words.

Procedure

Make a list of prefixes and base words as shown below. The words given in the previous exercise can be used here. Have your child combine each prefix with as many base words as possible. Check words in a dictionary if needed.

Prefixes	Base Words
mis-	tie
dis-	lay
re-	please
un-	arm
in-	change
en-	side
ex-	close

Variation

As a game for two or more children, write prefixes and root words on individual cards and shuffle them together. Deal five cards to each player. Place the deck between the players. The first player draws a card from the deck and, if possible, puts down a pair of cards to form a word. The player uses the word in a sentence, then discards. The next player can pick that card or draw one from the deck. The first player to lay down all of his cards wins.

Prefixes — Change Meaning

Objective

To see how prefixes can change the meaning of words.

Procedure

Find articles in newspapers or magazines, making sure each story you pick has some words with prefixes in it. Tell your child to look through the articles for words with prefixes, and to circle those words. Have him explain how the prefixes change the meanings of the words.

Suffixes

Objective

To practice adding the correct suffix to words in context.

Procedure

Write short sentences which include words requiring suffixes. Leave the suffixes out of the sentences, and have your child fill in the blanks where the suffixes are missing. Sentences can vary in difficulty depending on your child's age. In any case, your child should be able to tell from the context what suffix is needed in the blank space. Some examples:

The clerk said the purchase was not return_____. (able)

The team showed good sportsman_____. (ship)

Do not be care_____ when using electricity. (less)

The gray skies made the day very gloom___. (y)

The birds flew swift____ through the sky. (ly)

The team was in a cheer_____ mood after winning the game. (ful)

Base Words

Objective

To practice identifying base words when prefixes and suffixes are present.

Procedure

Write a list of words that contain prefixes and suffixes. Ask your child either to say or write down the base word. Many words ending with suffixes can be changed by adding prefixes such as *in-*, *un-*, *dis-*, or *non-* to the beginning of the base word (*lock-unlock*). It is possible to change many words that start with prefixes by attaching suffixes such as *-able*, *-ly*, or *-ous* to the end of the word. Some examples are given below:

incompletely	complete
disorderly	_____
nonpoisonous	_____
dislocated	_____
unbreakable	_____
refillable	_____
removable	_____
disagreement	_____
uncomfortable	_____
inactive	_____
unhealthy	_____
inexpensive	_____
undependable	_____
ineffective	_____
unemployment	_____

Contractions

Objective

To practice recognizing contractions and the pairs of words that form them.

Procedure

Write contractions on individual cards, one contraction per card. On another card write the two individual words that are involved in each contraction. Use the examples given below, or choose any other combinations you want. Place the cards for several of the word pairs in a column on the left and contraction cards in a different order in a column on the right. Your child should try to figure out which word pairs make which contraction. You can also show your child the card with the contraction and ask for the two words that form it.

did not — didn't
was not — wasn't
he is — he's
you are — you're
does not — doesn't
has not — hasn't
she is — she's
had not — hadn't
they are — they're
they would — they'd
we are — we're
we will — we'll
I have — I've
we have — we've
can not — can't
is not — isn't
I will — I'll
I am — I'm
he will — he'll
it is — it's
have not — haven't
they have — they've
there is — there's
do not — don't
she will — she'll
should not — shouldn't

Contractions

Objective

To practice using contractions in context.

Procedure

On individual cards, print sentences using groups of words that can be combined to form contractions. For example, the sentence *It is not very warm today* can become *It isn't very warm today*. Use examples of contractions from the previous exercise or any others you choose. On separate cards, write the contractions that fit into those sentences. Make sure there are as many contraction cards as sentence cards; if you use the contraction *can't* in three different sentences, make three different cards with the contraction *can't*. Show the sentence cards one at a time and have your child find the correct contraction card for each sentence. Keep going until all the contraction cards are used. The cards should look like this:

I can not find my shoe.

can't

Variation

As a game for two or more children, shuffle all the cards together and deal out five to each player. Place the rest of the cards in the middle of the playing area. The first player draws a card, and if it makes a pair, he lays down the pair, and the next player takes a turn. The winner is the first to lay down all of his cards.

Summary

There are steps that a child can follow to find the meaning of an unfamiliar word. The steps include:

1) Looking at the context.
2) Saying the first and last sound in the words.
3) Testing the pattern between how the word is spelled and how it sounds.
4) Learning how prefixes, suffixes, contractions, and other changes in words can affect word meanings.
5) Breaking an unfamiliar word into its parts to help figure out what the word is and what it means.

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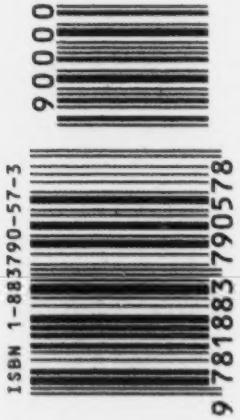

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